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TOT: 11 SEP 80

DIRECTOR [REDACTED]

SECRET
BRIEF 11 DIRECTOR
TO: LATIN AMERICA BRIEF.

[REDACTED]

LATIN AMERICA BRIEF [REDACTED] FOR 11 SEPT.

FROM: NFAC/DCO.

CONTENTS: 1. CHILE: CONSTITUTIONAL PLEBISCITE.

1. CHILE: CONSTITUTIONAL PLEBISCITE

//THE POLITICAL COSTS OF THE 11 SEPT PLEBISCITE ON A
NEW CONSTITUTION COULD OUTWEIGH THE BENEFITS TO PRESIDENT
PINOCHET. MILITARY REGIME.//

//THE ELECTION WAS PROBABLY FAIR--THERE WAS NO
KNOWN FRAUD IN A REFERENDUM IN 1978. AN OVERWHELMINGLY
FAVORABLE VOTE WOULD LEND AN AURA OF LEGITIMACY TO THE
REGIME FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ITS SEVEN-YEAR HISTORY. THE
CONSTITUTION CONFIRMS DIRECT MILITARY RULE UNTIL 1989
AND GIVES PINOCHET THE OPTION OF RUNNING FOR AN EIGHT-
YEAR CIVILIAN TERM AT THAT TIME.//

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// A CONVINCING VOTE ALSO WOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR PINOCHET TO IGNORE FOREIGN CRITICS, INCLUDING THE COUNTRIES IN THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES THAT CONSIDERED SPONSORING A RESOLUTION PROTESTING THE PLEBISCITE. IN ADDITION, DOMESTIC OPPOSITION LEADERS WHO HAVE URGED A "NO" VOTE WOULD APPEAR DISCREDITED.//

//THE REFERENDUM, HOWEVER, ALSO ENTAILS SERIOUS RISKS. SOME OF THE REGIME'S SUPPORTERS BELIEVE THAT IF A 60-PERCENT "YES" VOTE IS NOT OBTAINED, THE MILITARY WOULD BE EMBARRASSED AND COULD DEMAND CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PERSONNEL.//

//THE NEWLY AROUSED OPPOSITION IS TRYING TO USE THE PLEBISCITE TO RALLY POPULAR DISCONTENT. CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS--ALREADY STRAINED BY RECENT GOVERNMENT REPRESSION IN RESPONSE TO AN UPSURGE IN TERRORISM--HAVE WORSENED. CHILEAN BISHOPS HAVE PUBLICLY COMPLAINED THAT THE PLEBISCITE OFFERS NO REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE TO CONTINUED MILITARY RULE IF THE CONSTITUTION IS REJECTED.//

//EVEN IF HE WINS BY A WIDE MARGIN, PINOCHET MAY EVENTUALLY REGRET PROVIDING THE OPPOSITION SUCH A CLEAR TARGET. UNLESS HE TAKES STEPS IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS TO MOLLIFY MODERATE CRITICS WHILE ISOLATING MORE RADICAL OPPONENTS, THE PLEBISCITE COULD PROVE A HOLLOW VICTORY. PINOCHET'S PAST HARSH TREATMENT OF HIS DETRACTORS, HOWEVER, RAISES DOUBTS ABOUT HIS ABILITY TO NEUTRALIZE THE OPPOSITION.// RVW 11 SEP 10 DRV MULTIPLE

END OF MESSAGE

~~SECRET~~